

**Research question 2 = *What do you 'get out' of attending your men's group?***

**→ Analysis ↓**

**→ *Grounded and Emergent Concepts***

### **Other Emerging and Relevant Concepts**

#### **Safety:**

The data suggests that core features of participating men's groups worked to cause the subjective experience of safety that participants of this research required of them. Earlier cultural experiences were often unsafe and threatening and participants found that men's groups were different

*[when] you're in a circle..that is great..there's no one fuckin behind ye..no one standin over here..everyone is there..and like you says, there's no leader (Fom Gerry, who suffered serious physical abuse from Christian Brothers ))*

*we step into that place of sanctuary where..however we are..is ok..wherever we are is safe. I don't have to sit with...me back to the wall (Liam, who had to slide into his chair at home)*

Beyond the reassurance engendered by the physical format of the groups, how they operated offered further reassurance against potential or previously experienced threats to self-esteem. These threats are understood as the threat of being mocked on the one hand and patronised on the other.

*I just come away [from men's group] with a great sense of..peace (breaths strongly) from being around men in a grounded, or even a...a non-threatening way..an I won't get slagged or I won't get...eh...I have res..I'm respected (John)*

*[there is] no one looking down at me, there was no patronising me (Richard)*

*ye can say what ye want..an nobody comes up te ye afterwards an says, 'actually, deye know what ye should do'..if anyone had of said that to me I would've fuckin left the place (Noel)*

A related threat to safety was one associated with the potential for superficial or meaningless discourse within groups of men. Again this threat was not realised, further reinforcing the safety aspect to men's groups

*[men's groups] leaves the football outside the door an leaves..yeknow..the workplace..an any other bullshit tha ye talk about when ye..ye meet first..yeknowhaimean..an then, ye might wanna talk about what ye really wanna talk about (Derek)*

## **Truth**

Another important concept within men's groups – and one interwoven with safety and indeed depth - is the concept of honesty. This is a key concept that is understood as having a significant relationship with the final relevant concept of this analysis, that is, the concept of healing.

In the context of men's groups, honesty emerged as having two distinct – though related – aspects, understood as subjective truth and objective truth, with the interplay between these both determining the perception and experience of the healing concept.

Subjective truth: As established, participants in men's groups frequently reveal deep truths about themselves and their current and past experiences. Such truths include difficult psychological states and experiences, difficult family experience as well as broader community difficulties. However, such experiences are often surrounded by shame and fear making them difficult to express honestly to oneself, never mind a room full of other men. As such it is recognised that each man is honest to the extent that he can be at a particular time and that honesty is a work in progress. Thus

*in these groups, ye know, **to the best of everyone's ability**, everyone is being real (Neil)*

This is an important quality of the groups as it illustrates flexibility with regard to expression and acceptance and adds further to – and reinforces the notion of groups as open, accepting entities.

Objective truth: just as there is an acknowledgement that contributions in men's groups may not always be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, the unique men's group container seems to create the conditions where an objective – or collective - type of truth becomes transparent and verifiable. Thus Neil expresses the view

*I just think there is a realism which is very hard to define and very hard to put words on..that exists [in men's groups]..but you know it when you hear it, and you know it when you hear it*

A member of a separate group, Derek expresses the same view more bluntly

*you know bullshit when ye hear it..I just think we all do*

Objective truth in men's groups is usually something witnessed viscerally or through the body, rather than through the analytic mind. Expanding on his previous quote Neil describes how discernment between genuine and plausible truth occurs through his gut

I see that [acting/playing a role] in other groups, where - I don't know - when I hear someone..I just..something in my gut says..ye know, 'is that really what's going on there?', whereas in the men's group, very often you'd say yeknow, 'wow, that **is** what's goin on there' ...that person has *shown* themselves to us, **as they are**...not as they'd like to be or or..as..kindofa kindofa..supercool macho..'I have it all under control' way, ye know..that's something that's..very rare..to hear that real..eh voice, yeknow, that authentic voice

Other participants reiterate the notion of an embodied connection with truth:

Thus when listening in men's groups Eoin sometimes has eureka moments when, internally,he exclaims:

*'that's it'..'that really hits a bell'*

Or when

*somebody says something that just pins ye to your seat*

Alternatively, Noel describes witnessing truth in men's groups thus:

*ye could be sitin in a group of twenty men and there'd be one thing said by one man, that'll hit ye like a fuckin punch in the face..an ye'll go, 'fuck, I..I've known that for fuckin ever'..I just never heard it before*

### **Healing**

Healing is the final concept that emerged through analysis. Its relevance is without question as it is the primary motivation for participants attending men's groups and it is the most important concept that participating men's groups possess. Nevertheless healing is a complex, multifaceted concept, very much captured by the idea of fluidity utilised in this analysis. As such the concept of healing with respect to men's groups is understood as being intrinsically wrapped up with all the other concepts of figure 2 but most particular the notion of truth and the interplay of the essential elements of subjective and objective truth identified here. Thus the safe container of men's groups is understood to create a space where men can express difficult experiences and also listen to other men expressing theirs. This has the effect of creating a further atmosphere whereby the truth value of participant's articulations becomes transparent. This atmosphere is considered paramount for allowing healing to take place.

All participants – with maybe one exception – are men that have experienced psychological suffering that can be traced back to early childhood (and beyond). In the vast majority of cases, much of this suffering was inflicted and endured in the context of powerlessness and so psychological suffering usually went unexpressed and more often than not, actively repressed. Entering men's groups - for most men - was the point at which they began to reverse these processes and for the remainder it was an important part of this process. Thus plucking up the courage to sit with a group of men with the implicit - if not explicit - intention of dealing with past and current hurts marked

in the company of others and difficult and painful psychological psychologically painful. However, in terms of accuracy, such revelations are problematic and recognised as such in men's groups. Thus men's experiences as recounted in men's groups are subject to potentially confounding variables such as loss of memory – when experiences occurred in the distant past, memory distortion speaking about such experiences especially if they were in the distant past and/or surrounded in psychological anxiety (as many of them were) is deeply problematic in terms of ability to recall and articulate accurately. Such difficulties are enhanced in the context of being surrounded by numerous other men whom one may or may not be familiar with. As such it is recognised that

through analysis as both significant and complex. With findings indicated in the data immediately above, depth and safety are intertwined to the extent that they determine each other. It is also evident from this and other data, that other concepts are similarly intertwined – thus rendering them relevant to this research. These concepts are honesty, realism and healing.

Honesty: For the purposes of this research, the emerged concept of honesty is understood as subjective truth while realism is understood as a broader or community understanding of what is real and true. It is a finding of this research that the interplay of subjective truth and realism is a key vehicle for obtaining the final and perhaps most relevant concept of men's groups, healing.

As outlined above, the particular format of men's groups and the sense of safety it creates, is experienced by research participants as allowing deep truths and relevancies to emerge at the expense of the superficial, the irrelevant and the downright false. Thus when participants speak, they tend to articulate subjective experience of a personal nature – and

to express their opinions about a wide range of topics in an open and forthright manner. In doing so participants

*fellas comin to the group..were..yeknow..what they shared and the way they shared it..you just knew in your gut..they're talking reality..there was a naked honesty..nobody was there..there was nobody there out to impress anybody..there's an atmosphere..of no-nonsense (Richard, p.8)*

However articulating often difficult and remote experiences of a psychologically painful nature – which many of them are – is fraught with difficulty in terms of accuracy. This leads to an acceptance that

***to the best of everyone's ability, everyone is being real (Neil)***

Although privileging truth, men's groups are places where an acceptance exists whereby truth is understood as a work in process.

The particular format of men's groups works to include - or contain - some features associated with gatherings of people while working against the prevalence or occurrence of others. Consequently, equality, inclusion, safety and depth tend to occur in men's groups facilitated within men's group and their process, such as truth (and honesty) are themes that are understood as being further interlinked with safety and depth and these themes also emerged as highly relevant throughout the data set. So also did a related concept real.

The following will discuss these three relevant concepts in tandem, providing evidence for their important place within men's groups.

Thus the format of men's groups and the resultant safety that is established, allows for a depth to exist with respect to participant contributions. What is also allowed – and to some extent stipulated by this format and ethos – is the related notion of truth, honesty and realism.

Thus the atmosphere created by – and within - men's groups, the truth, honesty and realism of contributions become apparent, as does their absence. Thus when participants begin to speak in men's groups they often find themselves getting deeper and deeper into a topic which can often invoke difficult feelings such as confusion, awkwardness or embarrassment. This can result in conscious or unconscious decisions to minimise or disguise issues or simply a participant can become confused due to limits of memory and or vocabulary. For reasons that are as yet unclear, the presence of truth, honesty and realism within participant's contributions becomes transparent as does their absence. This feature of the groups is highly relevant in itself, but particularly so with respect to the final two relevant concepts below, wisdom and healing.

Derek states simply

*you know bullshit when ye hear it..I just think we all do*

*Other contributions on this topic are more circumspect*

*if a guy is sharin somethin about himself..you know it's real..there will be guys could be sharing something, you could see they're locked in their head..an ye say, 'Well, Jesus, I've been there'..yeknow particularly if you're a wee bit older, and ye've been around the block a wee bit longer, or even just at different times I..I will see some things an I'll say, "well, he's got te find that out for himself"*

*Neil sums up this quality of men's groups and*

*I just think there is a realism [in men's groups] which is very hard to define and very hard to put words on..that exists..but you know it when you hear it, and you know it when you hear it not..(laughs)..sometimes..ye just know, hey man..yeah they're all the words, yeah, they're the words but yeknow, are you really talking or is this something ye learnt..or is it in a book..did someone tell you that..(laughs)..ye know and..that's...that's something that's ha..very rare..to.. to hear that real..eh voice, yeknow, that authentic voice*

As indicated in the data above the truth, honesty and realism of what people say in men's groups becomes apparent easily in men's groups. Identifying levels of truth and realism

wisdom,

knowledge

healing

Also describe the more intricate elements of the model, the spokes, the hub etc

I'll report on the masculinity of model 2 in the next chapter. This is because it will be an integral part of explaining the relationship between model 1 and model 2 (i.e the grounded theory)

By not reporting it as significant to model 2 I'm saying that its largely an invisible concept because it is just assumed...is natural

In the same way I haven't dwelled on the gender component of model 1 beyond reporting the various actors of model 1 who happen to be gendered as well as the other attributes of them that emerged as relevant. Gender did not emerge as relevant with this particular collection of data.